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CURRENT OPINION

The Decline of the Rural Church

In the September number of the *American Journal of Sociology*, the diminishing usefulness of the rural church is discussed by Anton T. Boisen of Maine under the caption of "Factors Which Have to Do with the Decline of the Country Church." During the last five years the writer has worked as field investigator for the Department of Church and Country Life of the Presbyterian Church of America, his operations extending through Missouri, Tennessee, Kansas, New York, and Maine. The method used combined features of the social survey worked out by Dr. Warren H. Wilson with an intensive study similar to, although not derived from, that presented in Gill and Pinchot's *Country Church*. The chief measure of interest in the church was accepted as evidenced in church attendance. The data on this, as well as on school training, financial standing, social activities, and other pertinent questions, were obtained by submitting the names of the residents of the community to a few well-informed men and accepting their classification. The study embraces in all about 12,000 persons. In the districts studied the proportion of non-churchgoers varies considerably, from 20 per cent in Tennessee and 28 per cent in Missouri to 45 per cent in Kansas, 53 per cent in Westchester County, New York, and 65 per cent in Maine. It is pointed out by the writer as a startling fact that in the two sections exhibiting the feeblest efficiency as regards church management the church attendance is most general. The school training of the people in the different sections indicates with sufficient clarity the educational advancement in these communities. From the tables it is shown that "in the Tennessee and Missouri districts, where the interest in the church was general, the percentage of people with more than

common-school training was relatively low, while in Kansas, New York, and Maine, where interest in the church was restricted, the percentage of people with more than common-school training was relatively high." The increase in tenancy is commonly understood to be one of the chief causes of the decline of the country church. The writer's investigations tended to disprove this. In Maine, with the lowest proportion of tenancy, was also found the most meager church interest. "In four Maine communities studied, 73 per cent of the farmers did not attend church." The scarcity of labor in rural districts is a marked factor in lowering church attendance. The facilities for social intercourse outside the church determines largely attendance at church. In New England communities, where the attendance was relatively small, societies such as the Masons, Rebeccas, and the Knights of Pythias were flourishing, while in Tennessee, Missouri, and Kansas similar organizations were either absent or poorly developed and church interest very general. The factor which appears to bear most directly upon the decline of the country church is the conception of religion in the various districts. The author goes so far as to state that the removal of the fear-compulsion from the preaching of a literal hell, due to the liberalizing of public opinion, is the main cause of the restricted interest in the church. "In the five sections studied the proportion of those who have lost interest in the church varies directly with the liberalizing of popular religious opinion; and in the process of liberalizing popular opinion the efficiency of the schools and even of the churches themselves has worked, at least temporarily, to the church's disadvantage." A significant and hopeful fact remains, namely, that even in the more liberalized sections the better-educated and the more public-spirited are

still, for the most part, interested in the church, and the chief losses are among those in whom the altruistic and social interests are poorly developed.

Is a Creed a Sine Qua Non of Religion?

This question is given an emphatic negative by R. A. C. MacMillan in the *Expositor* for September, in an article entitled "The Religion without a Creed." In the present time when religion is expressing itself in all sorts of unconventional forms it may be pertinent to ask whether principles of religion exist today which are real and yet are not the simple product of experience. Principles may be adduced in the religious field which are discovered in experience, like every other form of knowledge, but are not derived from it. "Such principles would be described as a priori convictions of God and intuitions of the Unseen which owe nothing to the facts of history, except in the secondary sense that all truth is enriched by experience." Have these the reality of fact? Do they make possible a real relation between man and God, or does the religious consciousness remain within a closed circle of subjective feelings and ideas, imagining reality where none exists? Religion is generally evaluated in two entirely different ways. One is that religion is with its principles and institutions exclusively derived from facts of history and that when the significance of these facts disappears the decay and disappearance of religion itself are assured. Christianity is moribund because the facts from which its experience is derived are losing significance. The other evaluation of religion is that it is a congenital element of consciousness, "instinctive, original, and of universal acceptance." The indifferent skeptic holds that with either alternative the principles of religion remain purely subjective, having no substantive reality. The effect of such a time spirit is seen today in the large majority

of those who are losing sympathy with tradition and with all the institutions of historical religion. Many of these have a religion which is sufficiently real to them. They have a religion without a creed, containing all the elements necessary to religious experience. They have a genuine religious life, but find it difficult if not impossible to relate it to the historical facts of Christianity. Such a religion, although not dependent on fact as if it were only a derived product, really has a near affinity for fact. This religion without a creed is not actually out of sympathy with historical religion. It is a mental suspension of historical elements which have not yet been assimilated, and is really a religion historical in both character and motive. It is akin to that elemental religion expressed in the Hebrew psalms, as a "pure experience of God." "The only certain knowledge I have of God is the knowledge that he knows me through and through." This elemental religion is not a substitute for the historical religion of the New Testament. It contains all that is essential in historical religion until the particular type of mind which holds it is capable of entertaining more definite ideas. "Jesus Christ did not come to destroy such elemental knowledge of God, but to bring it to maturity by the demonstration of his own flesh and blood." "Whatever our own religious profession may be, however orthodox and doctrinal we may like to be, times will come in our lives when stress of experience, overcoming our accustomed habitudes of feeling and reflection, drives us back on this elemental knowledge of God, and then the most of historical fact that remains to us may only be, not even a face, but perhaps a hem that we can hardly recognize."

Nation-Building

In the *Expositor* for October is found an address on "The Building of the Nation," which was delivered by President Nicholas

Murray Butler at the annual luncheon of the Associated Press held in New York City. The opinion of George Meredith, given twenty years since, that with the happy outcome of the Civil War the American people had become leaders in civilization, is quoted and the following questions are asked: "Have we an American nation? If so, is that nation conscious of a unity of purpose and of ideals? If so, what is to be the policy of that nation in the immediate future?" The comparatively recent emergence of the nation-idea is noted. Not till the dream of a universal political empire had lost its hold upon the leaders of society did the organizing force of nationhood make itself felt in the thoughts and lives of men. A nation is defined as "a population of an ethnic unity inhabiting a geographic unity under a common form of government." The great danger has been, and still is, that people in seeking a geographic unity for nation-building have endeavored to incorporate discordant ethnic elements and to hold them in stern subjection. Again, in the development of the national ideal the nation has come to be conceived by many as an end in itself, "superior to law, to the conventions of morality, and to the precepts of religion." The present European war is an inevitable result of this type of thinking. There is an American nation. This has come into being as one of the issues of that movement for civil and political liberty, and for individual freedom, which displayed itself in Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and which traveled westward with the Puritan to Massachusetts Bay and with the Cavalier to Virginia. The two divergent forces of absolute federal control and sovereign authority in the individual state mainly brought about the war. These happily met adjustment. Then two other disintegrating forces appeared: (1) economic differences over a wide territory, creating a class conflict between capital and labor, and (2) im-

migration from other countries, bringing from the Old World its animosities and feuds and hates, and depriving America of unity of attitude, of feeling, and of policy in dealing with international questions. This last forms the gravest menace to nation-building today. The task before the American people is the integration of all the heterogeneous elements within the body politic around those great principles which will make an America free, just, forward-facing, and spending itself, not in mere self-aggrandizement, but in the highest service for the general good of all mankind.

The Rural Church and Its Pastor

"Why Pastors Leave Country Churches" is the subject of an article in *The Continent* for August 10, the authorship of which is not given. One reason for the exodus of the country minister is the fact that he is underpaid. The argument that money is more valuable in the country than in the city fails to make good. Again, the country minister not infrequently feels or is made to feel that he has no place in the denomination. The positions are all filled and the work all done by the men in city pastorates. Such being the condition, it is natural for the budding preacher to remain in a country parish no longer than absolutely necessary and to move to the city for the much-dreamed-of lengthy pastorate. The usual assumption is that not much can be expected from country ministers. A third reason for leaving the country church is the distressing provincialism against which the rural pastor must wage a life-long battle. In the city one can get away from provincialism but in the country one has to live with it. Against it, the preacher "will batter his head and bruise his heart all the days of his ministry, unless, alas, he loses the bright dreams and the high ambitions of his youth and settles down into the same rut as his parishioners, or goes off to the city—another minister finished practicing."

Pauline Theology and the Conception of Christian Sonship

Professor H. A. A. Kennedy in *The Expositor* for July writes on "The Regulative Value for the Pauline Theology of the Conception of Christian Sonship." Paul's conception of Fatherhood may fitly be made to revolve round two conceptions, "the Father of Compassions" (II. Cor. 1:3) and "the Father of Glory" (Eph. 1:17). The first conception implies love and tenderness. This divine compassion which has its counterpart in Jesus' gracious attitude toward human need, finds supreme utterance in God's redeeming purpose. This constitutes its central significance for Paul.

The second aspect of Paul's conception of the divine Fatherhood implies majesty, divine energy operating in and on behalf of those who are "sons," and the infinite divine resources placed at their disposal.

What is the bearing of Paul's conception of Christian sonship upon Pauline theology? In the first place it forms "the link between certain more or less technical ideas and the demands of practical experience. For example, whatever else justification may mean to Paul, it at least means a new relation to God, and when this relation turns out to be essentially that of sonship the entire significance of justification appears in a new light.

Secondly, Paul's idea of sonship strikes the "balance between the individual and the social aspect of Christianity. Paul was ever seeking to adjust the relation of the individual to the society, and no category so fitly meets his requirement as that of sonship."

To Paul the relation of sonship to the Father implies a blessedness which cannot essentially be surpassed. The eschatological outlook of Paul must always be judged in the light of his filial consciousness. In a unique way he takes precisely the same position as does Jesus. His entire

idea of Christian sonship is most intimately related to the teachings of the Master. The very aspects of divine Fatherhood stressed by Paul are the very features emphasized in the teaching of Jesus. Paul's Epistles are in reality an interpretation of the mind of Christ.

Religious Advance in Fifty Years

In the *American Journal of Theology* for July, President W. H. P. Faunce writes on the theme "Religious Advance in Fifty Years." The most noteworthy element in the religious advance of the past fifty years is in the rise of the idea of progress and evolution in religion. Instead of being static and unchangeable, religion has become dynamic and is conceived of as an unfolding, a forward-looking, upward-striving power. This conception of progress has given a new expression to religious faith in the hymnology of the church. The old hymns were peculiarly plaintive. Today we hear hymns of virility and joyousness.

Another profound change in the realm of religion during the last fifty years lies in the direction of a preference for the psychological approach to reality in place of the old dogmatic approach. "The forgiveness of sins, once a forensic process, is now interpreted as an inner experience, a change in the consciousness of God and man. The second coming, once a stupendous spectacle, has become a far more significant entrance of Christ into the consciousness of humanity—his immersion in the thinking and hoping and toiling of the entire world." This changing point of view is having its effect on denominationalism. Christian unity is making rapid advances. Together with this development is found the growth of comparative religion. The human processes by which other races have reached religious truth are being recognized.

This transition involves peril. The dogmatic method gave a sense of authority

which the psychological approach has not yet attained. With this shift comes the danger of the loosening of life, but also there comes the joy of a new inspiration in living.

Another notable change is that the sense of sin is becoming increasingly more urgent and compelling. The discovery of new sins has accompanied each new religious insight.

Religion is launching out on a great social movement. The social order is undergoing reconstruction. God is conceived of, not only as transcendent over the cosmos but as immanent in the social process. The vital task now before the church "is to make its formulas and its hymns reflect its new faith in a God immanent in the unfolding life of humanity."

These advances create problems. "The success of the Christian faith is the thing which imperils it." Can the church control the children to which it has given birth, or shall it be devoured by them? "If it is to survive, it must refuse to change its nature. It must hold itself more sacred and more divine than any of the changing channels through which it flows. It must keep the soul on top. It must rise above all its varying expressions and remain, as it has been in all its most triumphant days, at once the power of God and the wisdom of God."

Religious Education in the Home

"The Layman and His Home" is the subject of an article by R. E. Gaines in the *Review and Expositor* for July. Education has become the chief concern of the human race. Interest in the matter of training is increasing because of our growing appreciation of the social significance of our modern life. With the growing appreciation of social forces and the establishment of social institutions there is emerging a consciousness of social responsibility.

Of the social institutions which have been built up none is so important as the home. Moreover we are living in a time when the home is undergoing changes which seem to be lowering rather than raising its efficiency. "Some of our homes are going out of business—and into the divorce courts."

From the standpoint of education in the home, religious training and the use of the Bible have almost entirely disappeared. No doubt secular education has profited greatly by this change, but religious education has fallen by the wayside. The Bible ought to be a larger factor in our homes. Much of this book is not only interesting to children, but is nourishment to the social, intellectual, and spiritual life.

Family worship must be so restored that it will administer to the child's needs. This means that the child should have an active part in it. To accomplish this end parents will not only need direct instruction, but such teaching must be related to life itself. Certain great ideals should be found in every home which during plastic adolescence will find lodgment in the child's mind and life.

In order really to educate the child, the parent must understand him. A knowledge of child-nature will eliminate many an educational blunder. Particularly essential is it that the special problems which definite periods present should be understood. In all the training the relationship of a comrade rather than of a superior should be cultivated.

The home in its educational work cannot live unto itself. It must first have a vital relation to the church. Its organization should facilitate the fullest co-operation with the church. The home also should sustain a vital relation to the community as a sharer of and contributor to the community life.